

We claim:

1        1. A network receiving agent operable in a Scalable Interface system, the  
2 network receiving agent comprising:  
3            a sensor designed to receive information about an environment;  
4            an environment setting describing the status of a device in the environment; and  
5            an updater designed to update the environment setting based on data input to the  
6 sensor.

1        2. A network receiving agent according to claim 1, wherein the sensor is  
2 designed to receive a change in the availability of the device.

1        3. A network receiving agent according to claim 2, wherein the updater is  
2 designed to update the environment setting to reflect the change in the availability of the  
3 device.

1        4. A network receiving agent according to claim 1, the network receiving agent  
2 further comprising a receiver designed to receive an inquiry from a network lurking agent.

1        5. A network receiving agent according to claim 4, wherein the receiver is  
2 designed to respond to the inquiry from the network lurking agent based on the environment  
3 setting.

1        6. A network receiving agent according to claim 4, wherein the receiver is  
2 designed to access the device in the environment if the device is available.

1        7. A network receiving agent according to claim 6, wherein the receiver is  
2 designed to access the environment setting to determine the availability of the device.

1        8. A network receiving agent according to claim 4, wherein the receiver is  
2 designed to access an active device in the environment.

1        9. A network receiving agent according to claim 4, the network receiving agent  
2 further comprising:

3           a history store designed to store information about the inquiry, the information about  
4       the inquiry including a source of the inquiry; and  
5           a message store designed to store a message from the source of the inquiry when the  
6       device is not available.

1           10.     A network receiving agent according to claim 1, wherein the updater is  
2       designed to update the environment setting to reflect the availability of a user.

1           11.     A network lurking agent operable in a Scalable Interface system, the network  
2       lurking agent comprising:  
3           a lurker designed to visit an environment within the Scalable Interface system; and  
4           an inquirer designed to inquire as to the availability of a device in the environment.

1           12.     A network lurking agent according to claim 11, the network lurking agent  
2       further comprising a sender designed to send a message when the inquiry is refused.

1           13.     A network lurking agent according to claim 11, the network lurking agent  
2       further comprising a receiver designed to receive a message.

1           14.     A Scalable Interface system designed to support network lurking, the Scalable  
2       Interface system comprising:  
3           a network receiving agent designed to receive an inquiry about the availability of a  
4       device in an environment; and  
5           a network lurking agent designed to send the inquiry to the network receiving agent.

1           15.     A Scalable Interface system according to claim 14, wherein the network  
2       lurking agent is designed to place the inquiry in a Space in the Scalable Interface system.

1           16.     A Scalable Interface system according to claim 15, wherein the Scalable  
2       Interface system notifies the network receiving agent about the inquiry when the network  
3       lurking agent places the inquiry in the Space.

1        17. A Scalable Interface system according to claim 14, wherein the network  
2 receiving agent is designed to store an environment setting in a Space in the Scalable  
3 Interface system.

1        18. A Scalable Interface system according to claim 14, wherein the network  
2 receiving agent and the network lurking agent are designed to open devices as a result of the  
3 inquiry, the devices enabling communication.

1        19. A Scalable Interface system according to claim 14, wherein;  
2              the network lurking agent is designed to send a message when the inquiry is refused;  
3 and

4              the network receiver is designed to refuse the inquiry and to receive the message from  
5 the network lurking agent.  
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1        25. A method for using a network lurking agent to electronically lurk to an  
2 environment in a Scalable Interface system, the method comprising:  
3            lurking to the environment; and  
4            inquiring as to the availability of the environment.

1        26. A method according to claim 25, wherein inquiring as to the availability of the  
2 environment includes inquiring as to the availability of a user in the environment.

1        27. A method according to claim 25, the method further comprising responding to  
2 the inquiry by a network receiving agent.

1        28. A method according to claim 27, wherein responding to the inquiry includes  
2 accessing devices by the network lurking agent and the network receiving agent to enable  
3 communication.

1        29. A method according to claim 27, wherein responding to the inquiry includes:  
2 refusing the inquiry by the network receiving agent;  
3 sending a message from the network lurking agent to the network receiving agent; and  
4 storing the message for later access from the environment.

1        30. A method according to claim 27, wherein responding to the inquiry includes:  
2 sending a message from the network receiving agent to the network lurking agent; and  
3 receiving the message at the network lurking agent.

1        31. A computer-readable medium containing a program to use a network lurking  
2 agent to electronically lurk to a location on a computer system, the program being executable  
3 on the computer system to implement the method of claim 25.

1        32. An apparatus for using a network receiving agent to update an environment  
2 setting in a Scalable Interface system, the apparatus comprising:  
3            means for receiving sensor input from a device in an environment; and  
4            means for updating the environment setting based on the sensor input.

1        33. An apparatus according to claim 32, wherein the means for updating includes  
2 means for updating the environment setting to reflect the availability of the device.

1        34. An apparatus according to claim 32, wherein the means for updating includes  
2 means for updating the environment setting to reflect the availability of a user.

1        35. An apparatus according to claim 32, the apparatus further comprising:  
2 means for receiving an inquiry; and  
3 means for sending a message in response to the inquiry.

1        36. An apparatus for using a network lurking agent to electronically lurk to an  
2 environment in a Scalable Interface system, the apparatus comprising:  
3            means for lurking to the environment; and  
4            means for inquiring as to the availability of the environment.

1        37. An apparatus according to claim 36, wherein the means for inquiring includes  
2 means for inquiring as to the availability of a user in the environment.

1        38. An apparatus according to claim 36, the apparatus further comprising means  
2 for responding to the inquiry by a network receiving agent.

1        39. An apparatus according to claim 38, wherein the means for responding  
2 includes means for accessing devices by the network lurking agent and the network receiving  
3 agent to enable communication.

1        40. An apparatus according to claim 38, wherein the means for responding  
2 includes:  
3            means for refusing the inquiry by the network receiving agent;  
4            means for sending a message from the network lurking agent to the network receiving  
5 agent; and  
6            means for storing the message for later access from the environment.

1        41. An apparatus according to claim 38, wherein the means for responding  
2 includes:  
3            means for sending a message from the network receiving agent to the network lurking  
4 agent; and  
5            means for receiving the message at the network lurking agent.